

**An Untitled Blight Story
(Sample Prologue)**
By
Gabe Wollenburg

Fingers pushed across the pavement make a wet scraping sound. Any passerby who might wonder to look might see merely a very bored little Asian boy laying the wrong direction across a concrete bench, his face dangling over the edge, staring absently down to where his arms dangled. As he hangs, he pushes a finger across the concrete, shoving small ruts into the detritus beneath the bench, drawing

fantastic patterns in the filth and dust that gather in such places.

The passerby might think that it is odd that the scupperers hadn't yet come buy and swept the dirt and grime from under the bench. The city had made such a deal of the new biotronic scupperers that they'd purchased as part of a municipal bulk buy from the Chinese, that it was unusual to see dirt and filth accumulate anywhere.

Then again, the passerby might do what most passersby do, that is, they might pass by, not noticing.

Were passersby to look closer, and were they able to see past the dirt and fifth that their tax credits and municipal upkeep surcharge fees pay to eliminate, they might see that there is something not right with the boy. His sadness is deeper than just a basic depression, boredom or a need of a hobby or something to do. He reaks of the absence of joy. He holds himself flat, unremarkable. He is what is left when there is nothing more to cry.

Intuitives, and those with intuitive implants passing by the Asian boy an might sense an unfamiliar kind of emptiness about the area. However,

emptiness is hard to intuit, and such a sensation would by only the very sensitive be undismissed as cold shudder, a chill, or a tingle in the neck.

All, fortunately, are not untrained. But emotional awareness is not the only clue that all is not right with this boy. It is obvious. It is right out in the open to be seen, if only someone might look closer.

If some were to look closer, some might see that the boy presses not his own finger across the dust and mud beneath the bench. Those who might look closer would see more than the sad boy. They might see that he doodles absently in the sand with a finger that is not his own. He draws with a rigor mortis stiffened part of another's body. He draws with a finger one not properly attached to a another's hand.

But none who notice such things are near. None see as the sad Asian boy sits on the bench. None see him sigh, labor over a blink and a yawn, and look blankly across the avenue. All the while, the boy mindlessly plays with the finger in his hands, rolling it back and forth, and letting it tumble between his two ashen palms.

Dusk comes. An early autumn wind blows the dust and street flakes in little eddies at boy's feet.

He leans back on the wall behind the bench, holds the finger up, inspects it momentarily. It is greenish, slightly putrid, and rough. Callouses toughen the skin on the fleshy parts of the finger, and the skin is broken around the knuckle area on the finger's back. Like a fighter. Or a laborer. Or a box maker.

The boy notes none of this in his empty mind. These details go as unnoticed has he. The boy pops the finger in his mouth, chews a bit, and then swallows. His expression never changes. It is as if he's just had a snack.

After a short time, when the streetlights have switched on and the dusk has faded to a cobalt and starless evening, the boy stands suddenly, as if called by an unseen force, and slouches off, ambling in a wandering lost manner. His feet and legs pull him along the avenue, but his mind remains lost, seeming bored, disinterested, or distracted.

He no more notices those around him than he is noticed by those who he is around. He makes his way up the avenue. No scupperers come to wash the bench. No cleaning biotronics stir along the now empty streetscape. No sinewave hum from the city's always present power cell distributors. It's quiet. For

the first time in a long time in Sugar Island, the center of North American biotronics industry and America's first self sustaining megalopolis, there is no buzzing, no humming, and no clatter.

Just the walkers. The hundreds of children, ambling down the streets. Lurching northward. Heading into the old part of the city. The part abandoned after the accident. The part where no one, not even the scupperers, go.

None who notice such things are present to notice. None who notice such things are near now. But it's only a matter of time until someone does.